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ABSTRACT

To study the effect of motivating statements on the achievement of young children, a group of 52 first grade boys and girls was randomly divided into two groups. The experimental group was assigned a verbal task and given positive motivation on their ability to accomplish the task. The control group was merely given the assignment. Results of the t test indicated significantly higher task performances among the experimental group ($p<05$). These differences remained significant when studied separately for boys and girls, respectively. (Author/MS)

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THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY:

AN ADAPTATION*

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The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: An Adaptation

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To study the effect of motivating statements on the achievement of young children, a group of first grade boys and girls was randomly divided into two groups. The experimental group was assigned a verbal task and given positive motivation on their ability to accomplish the task. The control group was merely given the assignment. t test results indicated significantly higher task performances among the experimental group ($p < .05$). These differences remained significant when studied separately for boys and girls, respectively.

Rosenthal and Jacobson (1966) extended the generality that experimentors have been shown to be a significant determinant of a subject's response to teachers and students. They found that the I.Q.S. of the subjects, whose teachers thought they had high academic expectation, were increased significantly more, during the period they were studied, than those students whose teachers didn't believe this. Palardy (1969) found that when first grade teachers believed boys would be less successful than girls in learning to read, the boys taught by those teachers scored lower on a reading achievement test than a comparable group of boys whose teachers reported they believed the boys would be as successful as girls in learning to read. Neither Rosenthal and Jacobson or Palar y attempted to explain how the effect was commumicated from teachers to students.

Blakey and others (1971) supported Rosenthal's and Jacobson's self-fulfilling prophecy effect in adult education classes and studied how the effect was communicated from teacher to student. They found that significantly more "warming" statements and fewer "cooling" statements were used with the students who were expected to give higher performance. Glock (1972) failed to find a significant difference between the performance of a group of students who were expected to be of superior intelligence and a control group. He found, however, that teachers did spend significantly more

time using positive, accepting and supportive communication with the experimental group.

Aronson and Carlsmith (1962) found that those whose expectancy is consistant with their performance will be content and those whose expectancy and performance are not consistant will be dissonant and tend to have their performance conform to their expectance. Korman (1971) concluded from the results of five studies that subjects who thought others, regardless of the sources of expectation and the characteristics of the person performing, had higher expectations of their task performance performed significantly higher than those, who thought others had low expectations of their performance.

The purpose of this study was to study the effect telling first graders they could successfully complete a task would have on their task performance when the pupil is aware of the teacher's attitude and the teacher is aware he is praising the pupil.

The subjects were 52 first graders who attended a school in a middle class section of the North Bronx. The materials consisted of a three page short story, where the subjects had to underline as many words as they could beginning with the letters s and t in two minutes, and a stop watch to do the timing. The task was chosen because it was a skill that was possessed by all of the subjects.

The subjects were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. Both groups were given the same instructions.

In addition, the experimental group was told that the researcher knew they would all perform very well and would have no trouble. Means and standard deviations were calculated and t tests were performed.

The findings are shown in Table 1. A significant difference was found at the .01 level in task performance between the group of first graders who heard the motivating statement and the group of first graders who didn't.

TABLE 1

t Test of Mean Difference in Task Performance Between Total Experimental and Control Groups

	Experimental		Control
X	25.0		17.9
S.D.	9.1		6.2
N	26		26
t		*3.0	

*p < .01

Table 2 indicates that a significant difference was found at the .05 level in task performance between the group of first grade boys who heard the motivating statement and the group of first grade boys who didn't.

TABLE 2

t Test of Mean Difference in Task Performance Between Experimental and Control Groups of First Grade Boys.

	Experimental		Control
X	26.1		18.5
S.D.	10.8		8.4
N	16		16
t		2.2*	

*p < .05

The findings shown in Table 3 also indicate a significant difference ($p < .05$) in task performance between the group of first grade girls who heard the motivating statement and the group of first grade girls who didn't.

TABLE 3

t Test of Mean Difference in Task Performance Between Experimental and Control Groups of First Grade Girls.

	Experimental		Control
X	23.2		17.0
S.D.	5.1		6.4
N	10		10
t		2.3*	

*p < .05

Thus a statement telling first graders they could do well significantly increased their task performance. The task performance of first grade boys and first grade girls was also significantly increased, when they were told they could do well.

Further research is warranted. The effects of giving motivating statements to children over a long period of time should be studied along with the length of time the effect lasts. Changes in self concept should be measured as performance changes. Further research should be used to test the effects motivating statements have of children of different ages and from different socio-economic and home backgrounds.

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